

TWO JAIL WORKERS CITED IN COVERUP

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LA Times

A former deputy and an assistant allegedly filed false reports in prisoner's beating.

BY RICHARD WINTON

Los Angeles County prosecutors have accused two county jail workers of trying to cover up a deputy's alleged beating of an inmate at the Twin Towers jail.

A former Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy and a custody assistant were arrested and charged this week with felony filing false police reports in connection with another deputy's alleged assault on an inmate on Christmas Day 2010 at the downtown Los Angeles facility.

Karin Cring, a former deputy now living in Switzerland, was taken into custody Wednesday after authorities received information that she was at a residence in Covina.

Sheriff's investigators also arrested custody assistant Jayson Ellis, who has been on paid leave since July 2012 in connection with the investigation. Both were ordered held on \$20,000 bail; Cring and Ellis were released on bail Wednesday evening, jail records show.

They have been charged with falsely reporting an incident in which authorities alleged that another deputy, Jermaine Jackson, assaulted an inmate using "a deadly weapon" — his feet.

Jackson was charged last year with causing great bodily injury, assault by a public officer and filing a false report in connection with that incident and another incident at the Compton courthouse lockup in 2009. He is awaiting trial.

Ellis, who has worked for the department since 2006, has been on paid leave, but [See Jail, AA4]

Twin Towers staffers cited

[Jail, from AA1] after his arrest Wednesday, his status was shifted to unpaid leave, Sheriff's Department spokesman Steve Whitmore said.

The arrests by local authorities are the latest charges to be filed as the FBI and federal prosecutors continue to investigate deputy misconduct within the Los Angeles County jail system, the largest in the nation.

"This investigation and the arrests were made by the Sheriff's Department," Whitmore said.

The alleged assault by Jackson in Twin Towers was described in a declaration filed previously by the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California. In a sworn statement, inmate Derek Griscavage said he was housed in the Twin Towers jail in downtown Los Angeles when Jackson shouted profanities at him because he did not drop to his knees fast enough during a routine search. Prosecutors said Cring and Ellis falsely stated the reasons for the search of the cell, saying that they had seen him passing contraband.

In his sworn statement, Griscavage said he flashed his middle finger at the jailer, whom he described as a bulky, 6-foot deputy with a shaved head.

About 20 minutes later, the deputy ordered him to face a jail window and then kicked the insides of Griscavage's ankles hard with his boots, according to the declaration.

Jackson, Griscavage said, handcuffed him and "savagely pushed my cuffed hands up so my arms resembled chicken wings, straining my shoulders and handling me with enough force that my face was pushed into the pod window."

Jackson then forced Griscavage to walk to an area of the jail where four or five deputies were waiting, and "everything went black," the declaration said.

Griscavage said he woke up in the hospital "with a stabbing pain in my head ... undoubtedly the worst headache I have ever felt." He said there was blood on his bare chest, and his eyes were "swimming with blood flowing out of the cuts on my face and head."

He said he suffered a broken nose, black eyes, a cut to his ear, a swollen head and a chipped tooth. Inmates later told him that Jackson had punched him while he was handcuffed and had kneed and kicked his head and face, according to the declaration.

Griscavage said a sheriff's detective visited him about the incident but that her focus was not whether the deputy assaulted him but whether he attacked the deputy and caused a scratch to Jackson's hand.

He said the detective told him he needed to give a blood sample to ensure that the deputy had not been exposed to any infectious diseases, but she did not ask any other questions about the incident.

Griscavage alleged that another deputy snickered at him, saying, "I heard you got knocked out."

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Social workers struggle to arrange foster homes

Mon 8-26-13 LA Times

[Foster care, from A1]
pus of Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center. A large open space with cribs for infants and cots for other children, it can have as many as 29 children sleeping over on some nights.

Officials acknowledged they don't always have enough personnel to promptly feed children or change diapers. The department recently issued an emergency plea for community volunteers to help in the holding rooms.

Older children who can't be quickly placed in foster homes typically are sent to a conference room in a high-rise building south of downtown Los Angeles, where they sleep on the floor or cots, according to social workers staffing the facility.

Employees have told The Times a volatile mix involving teenagers can land in the facility. At times, objects have been thrown and police have been called to restore order, said Lincoln Saul, a recently retired county social worker who worked at the center.

In addition to lingering in holding centers, hard-to-place children often endure a bureaucratic gantlet, records and interviews show. Each day, social workers take them to various regional offices across the county as the search for foster homes continues.

If nothing is found, they are driven back to the holding rooms in the evening. During the placement hunt, they are not enrolled in school, have no rooms of their own and have virtually no privacy.

"I wouldn't say this problem is under control, but we are making progress," said Philip Browning, director of the Department of Children and Family Services.

A number of factors has exacerbated the foster bed shortage. For one, the county lacks an accurate, real-time database of foster home vacancies. The system, updated just once a month, lists the licensed capacity of a home but not the

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— DR. ASTRID HEGER,
head of medical assessment
team for foster children at
County-USC Medical Center

number of beds a foster parent now is willing to fill.

Social workers are left largely to their own contacts, experience and word of mouth to find vacancies. Records show offices with more experienced workers, such as the West San Fernando Valley, rarely use holding rooms. Offices with some of the newest social workers — in Hawthorne, Compton, South Los Angeles and Palmdale — resort to holding rooms more frequently.

Efforts to improve tracking of vacancies are under way, Browning said. But he added that it would not compensate for the fundamental problem: too few foster homes.

Over the last decade, the number of foster parents has been declining faster than a reduction in children entering the system. In 2007, the county had 7,800 children in 6,380 foster family homes; there now are 6,300 children in 3,440 foster homes.

The bed shortage is especially acute for infants, partly because the gap between the cost of caring for the children and what the state pays families is the greatest. California's reimbursement rate for very young children would have to be increased 61% to match foster parents' costs, according to a recent study by Children's Rights, a national foster care advocacy group.

The rate for children younger than 4 was recently boosted to about \$680 a month, which is still hundreds of dollars below the estimated costs for foster parents.

"We need more homes and we need to pay them more," Browning said. "But the rates are set by the state, not the county, and that constrains us." The department is exploring ways to ease the financial burden of young children, such as providing free child care, diapers and transportation.

Browning said the county is entering new contracts with private, nonprofit foster care agencies to accept children 24 hours a day. Officials also recently agreed to pay the county's probation department \$400,000 to speed up criminal background checks on relatives who are willing to take children removed from homes.

Astrid Heger, a doctor who leads a medical assessment team for foster children in the County-USC Medical Center holding center, criticized the response to the crisis by state agencies that fund and regulate the system.

There is one advantage to children passing through holding rooms, she said. With her program on site, for example, the USC center provides a venue for formal medical and mental health assessments of young children, which help ensure placements are appropriate and reduce return visits, she said. But her team isn't always given the time to fully assess foster children, particularly in complex cases that require extra resources, she said.

"I'm completely fed up with success being ... we got the kid out of here within 24 hours," Heger said. "There is a lot more that needs our attention."

"How can you plan for these kids when you don't know what's really wrong with them?"

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County foster care at crisis point

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A surge of children leaves more in holding rooms, and the state is threatening fines.

BY GARRETT THEROLF

Los Angeles County's shortage of foster care beds has reached a crisis point, with state officials threatening to impose fines because too many children are languishing in sometimes chaotic holding rooms during traumatic separations from their families.

Officials say the problem intensified in recent weeks after the widely publicized torture death of 8-year-old Gabriel Fernandez, for which his mother and her boyfriend have been charged. The Palmdale boy's case triggered a jump in child abuse hotline calls and the number of children entering county protective care.

Between May 28 and July 5, nearly 600 children were diverted to holding rooms as social workers scrambled unsuccessfully to find them homes, according to data obtained under the California Public Records Act.

Stays exceeded a state-imposed 24-hour legal limit in 117 cases, and dozens of children spent multiple nights in the holding centers before being placed in foster homes. By comparison, last August only one child remained in a holding room longer than 24 hours, and overall about a third fewer children were diverted to the centers.

Typically, children who

become stuck in the government-run way stations are the hardest to place: infants, large groups of siblings, children returning from failed placements and the mentally ill or those afflicted with lice, ringworm, chickenpox, respiratory problems and other infectious diseases. Placing a child often requires more than 100 calls by social workers, records showed.

California regulators have given the county until

Wednesday to fix the problem or face possible daily financial penalties.

And a prominent non-profit law firm is warning it may bring legal action to force a resolution of the problems it says state and county officials have failed to address in the past.

The San Francisco-based Youth Law Center maintains that potential penalties of \$200 a day have been ineffective and don't apply to a serious short-

coming of the system: instances in which children have multiple holding room stays of less than 24 hours because they are shuffled between facilities.

"This crisis has been building for several years," said Maria Ramiu, a Youth Law Center lawyer. "The state just hasn't been able to fix the problem."

Children younger than 12 typically go to the Children's Welcome Center on the cam-

[See Foster care, A12]

Fr 8-23-13 Daily Breeze

Gardena mayor stumps for sheriff's job

Former undersheriff in challenge to Baca says department needs to refocus its mission

By Brian Charles

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Fresh off his announcement that he will run for Los Angeles County Sheriff, Paul Tanaka, mayor of Gardena and the former undersheriff, held a fundraiser and campaign rally Wednesday.

Inside the popular karaoke bar, Cherrystones Grill and Grotto, Tanaka addressed a crowd of supporters and laid out the framework for his campaign.

"If you don't have a safe neighborhood what good is the senior service? What good are the schools? What good are the



Paul Tanaka, who is running for Los Angeles County sheriff, has launched his campaign.

youth services or after school programs?" Tanaka said to dozens of supporters gathered at Wednesday night's event. "If you don't have a good, safe community you have nothing.

Therefore the largest and strongest obligation is on the back of the police officers and deputy sheriffs."

Tanaka launched his campaign last week, not long after he retired from the department. The 33-year law enforcement veteran who began his career in El Segundo moved to the Sheriff's Department in 1982. He rose through the ranks and was undersheriff — the depart-

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Tanaka

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ment's second-highest rank — before retiring.

Along with Tanaka, three other candidates plan to challenge incumbent Sheriff Lee Baca. They are retired Sheriff's Cmdr. Robert Olmsted, who acted as a whistleblower about the beatings of inmates at Men's Central Jail; perennial candidate Lt. Patrick Gomez, who has twice lost to Baca; and Los Angeles Police Department Detective Lou Vince.

During the campaign rally Wednesday night, Tanaka said he wants the Sheriff's Department to refocus on its core mission.

"Take the bad guys off the street and provide the good guys with a safe neighborhood to go home to," Tanaka said.

And while he served directly under Baca, Tanaka has been an outspoken critic of his former boss.

"There comes a time after 15 years of the same leadership and voice that you need a change," he said.

Tanaka has traded barbs with his former boss in the press and said his criticism was a direct result of being made a scapegoat for a Sheriff's Department scandal. A blue-ribbon report last year blamed him and Baca for an abusive atmosphere inside the agency's jails.

Tanaka denied encouraging deputies to use excessive force on inmates.

Beyond what could be a contentious race between a former boss and his top deputy, the nation's largest sheriff's department faces a tall task in prison realignment.

After a federal court ordered California to reduce its prison population, the county jails were saddled with handling additional inmates. Tanaka said one prisoner recently sentenced to 42 years in prison will serve his sentence in a county jail.

"We're not set up for longterm housing," Tanaka said.

To cope with the extra demands placed on the jails, Tanaka said the institutions need skills and education programs that will curb recidivism and give inmates a positive outlet in jail.

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Foster agency faces big fines

Displaced kids languish in unfit conditions; more foster families are 'desperately' needed

By Christina Villacorte

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Starting Wednesday, state regulators are threatening to slap fines on the county Department of Children and Family Services every day until all kids taken into protective custody are placed in foster care within 24 hours instead of languishing for days at facilities ill equipped for extended stays.

"If there are not significant reductions in the number of overstays, the California Department of Social Services will begin assessing daily civil penalties against DCFS ... on August 28, 2013," CDSS Interim Deputy Director David Dodds wrote to DCFS Director Philip Browning this month.

Browning acknowledged the department is "desperate" for more foster parents, partly because of a surge in calls to its child protection hotline following publicity about the torture and killing of 8-year-old Gabriel Fernandez in Palmdale last May.

In the short term, DCFS is contracting with non-profit foster agencies and group homes to provide emergency shelter for children removed from their own homes because of suspected abuse or neglect.

DCFS is also trying to hasten criminal background checks on relatives who have offered to care for those children. "My hope is that ... (the state) will see that we're making a good faith effort to remedy the situation," Browning said.

Kids are supposed stay no more than 24 hours at DCFS' Children's Welcome Center on the L.A. County-USC Medical Center campus or at the

Foster

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Emergency Response Command Post. But in the letter to Browning, Dodds noted "overstays" are still prevalent.

"For example, 22 children remained at the CWC for 24 hours or more between July 21 and 31," Dodds wrote. "Nine of those children were present ... for 48 hours or more, four children for 72 hours or more, and one child was present for 105 hours."

CDSS spokesman Michael Weston noted the maximum fine is \$200 a day. "The practice of 'overstays' must be addressed on a systemwide basis to ensure children are receiving proper care and supervision," he said.

For most of the second half of 2012, DCFS recorded zero overstays at the CWC. The number, however, rose dramatically last spring. By April and May, there were 72

overstays, overshadowed by 87 in June alone.

DCFS was able to find foster care quickly for 3,000 other children during the same period. County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas acknowledged that DCFS needs reforms. "Of course we do not want to be fined, but the county has to do right by these children," he said in an email.

Browning noted the number of hotline referrals rose from an average of 10,000 a month to a peak of almost 13,000 in May, coinciding with the publicity over Fernandez's death, allegedly at the hands of his mother and her boyfriend after social workers ignored reports of abuse.

In contrast, the number of foster homes has plunged 70 percent over the last six years, to about 540. Among the reasons people aren't signing up is the low reimbursement rate set by the state.

"Most foster parents don't

do it for the money," Browning said. "Most do it because they want to give a child a loving place, even if it's just temporary, but the payment rates are \$500 to \$600 a month, depending on the age of the child. My goal is for foster parents to at least not incur out-of-pocket expenses, so we're trying to provide them with diapers, formula and child care services while they're at work."

And with that, he issued an appeal. "We desperately need additional foster care parents who'd be willing to take a young child for a short period until we find a more permanent place," he said. "For every 100 hotline calls, we detain about seven kids. That percentage has remained constant, but we have a lot more calls coming in, and we just don't have the resources we need for that surge in children."